

# **RECRUITING VOUNTEERS PRESENTATION**

## **for MDAR WORKSHOP**

February 12, 2008

Who here has volunteered for something in the last year? five years?

I am writing these on easel pad, at same time wondering if someone voluntarily comes forth to be the scribe! If someone does not volunteer, then hammer home the point that

Volunteers most often have to be asked, i.e. recruited

[However, recruiting is often the easy part—keeping volunteers and sustaining a productive level of volunteer commitment can be more challenging than finding volunteers]

Why do people volunteer? [citations from the audience]

- Have the time

- Try to gain experience and skills—increasingly the case today with a plethora of unpaid internships, especially for young people

- Recognize the need for their help and involvement

- Are educated about the need for their help

- Have a talent they can share

- Get to know a new community (for recent arrivals)

- Help in the community; social interaction of being with other volunteers

- Have an interest in the issue, care about it and want to help

### How to find volunteers

Start close to home with family and friends, and ask them. Even if family is not volunteering per say, their support of you is **very** important whether paid manager or volunteer.

Use press releases in the local newspapers (human interest stories best), or sometimes even better if there is a top notch reporter, offer to be the focus of a story about the market and during interview emphasize volunteer opportunities ; local cable TV; get on a radio program; bulletins of local clubs and organizations, churches,

Volunteer yourself to be a speaker at service organizations (Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, etc), Chamber of Commerce, or any other group that looks for speakers. By combing local papers for announcements of meetings with speakers, find which groups might welcome you to learn more about FMs in general and yours in particular.

Word of mouth—yours as the market manager; other satisfied volunteers—ask them to ask other people and keep an eye out.

Volunteer yourself at local food pantry or soup kitchen and tell other volunteers about your market. This is not stealing—often the busiest people are the best volunteers and those here are interested and obviously already showing a volunteer spirit

In MA, high school students have to fulfill community service requirements in order to graduate. Last summer BFM became an “in” place for some local students who gathered in increasingly larger numbers because helping at BFM became a “cool” thing—and it was fun!

At the Market itself—always have a volunteer sign-up sheet and when shoppers show interest in the market, be sure to let them know they can volunteer and how.

Fairs, Town Day and especially any other pre-season spring events

Never miss an occasional opportunity—someone asks you about the FM, ask them to get involved, ex. of someone jogging by as I was putting out a market day sign.

Your FM website or electronic newsletter

## Managing volunteers

*Recognize that keeping volunteers may be more challenging than finding them*

**Know your volunteer**—if a stranger to you, you have a responsibility to know something about this person—you wouldn’t hire a person without checking references. But most times we tend not to ask volunteers for them, so it is incumbent upon managers to find out as much as they can about a potential volunteer before involving the person. It is OK to have an “application” i.e. a volunteer form that asks for references and why the person wants to volunteer.

Have job and task descriptions, with, if possible, time requirements. Find out what interests and talents the volunteer has; try to match job with that/organize around these. Breaking tasks into small parts can be helpful. Try to have a variety of time expectations. Example: presence at the market for two hours (small time & responsibility); oversight of a website (huge time & responsibility!)

Make sure volunteers know what is expected—have an instruction sheet; date specifics.

Reminders help—weekly bulletins; target reminders –volunteers are often very busy and need to be reminded of commitments; avoid nagging. Volunteers need reminders that what they do is important to the organization; that you’re depending on them.

Nitty-gritty—make sure liability insurance covers volunteers; good to have emergency contact information for all volunteers, especially for teens (get a parental permission form signed for anyone under 18)

If there’s a bad situation that makes work difficult for volunteers, work together to change it. Example: in BFM’s first year, volunteers had to schlep tent and gear from home and store them between market days and all yearlong. Permission was sought and granted to

build a storage bin (constructed by volunteers of course!) and keep that on-site, thus making the volunteer effort much easier.

Keep up your end of the deal—esp. paid managers. Not unlike the workplace—management sets the tone. If you say you will take care of something, do something—be sure to follow through. Set the example by your commitment to your FM.

A sour note—the volunteer who is not quite up to snuff. Try non-judgmental conversations about the problem. Try to accommodate changes in people's lives. Try to avoid guilt—a turn-off. Recognize that people have off-days and can have emergencies, but if a volunteer consistently fails to show up or does not fulfill his/her commitment in a responsible way, find out why. When a volunteer “does more harm than good” (takes your time away from other responsibilities), it may be best to cut bait! Suggesting that perhaps because priorities have shifted, the volunteer may not have time or interest, allows a gracious exit for both parties. Poor volunteers often tend to disappear or resign themselves.

Create a positive FM spirit in a positive site environment—have water, treats for volunteers on hand. Foster and have pride in your FM organization.

Recognize the value of a good volunteer commitment and effort. Reward volunteers with encouragement and **Praise, Praise, Praise** for good work and as members of your FM team. Small tokens associated with the market—t-shirt, tote bag, etc.—are nice gestures, especially for regular volunteers who give a specified number of hours. Celebrate your collaborative efforts with a season's end dinner or a pre-season event. Use local media to highlight volunteer efforts—photo, names, jobs done. A satisfied volunteer is usually an outstanding volunteer, one who takes pride and pleasure in being part of an endeavor.

It almost always takes a dedicated team to run a successful farmers' market

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Belmont Farmers' Market